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## ENGLISH EMBROIDERIES

**D**URING the past few years the Museum has gradually been acquiring representative examples of early English embroideries, and these have recently been brought together and placed on exhibition in the English Room (Gallery 19) on the second floor of the Wing of Decorative Arts, where they will remain until further notice. Through the courtesy of several friends of the Museum, the collection has been augmented by a number of exceptionally fine loans, so that the embroideries, as now exhibited, cover a period extending from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century and may be grouped under two heads: ecclesiastical and secular.

While the *opus anglicanum* of the great period of English work is not represented in the present exhibit save by a water-color drawing of the famous Ascoli Cope, there is among the treasures of the Morgan Collection, to be exhibited during the coming winter, a wonderful strip of ecclesiastical embroidery, formerly exhibited in the Victoria and Albert Museum. This work is ranked by Lethaby<sup>1</sup> as one of the most important in the history of English embroidery and considered by him to be "a royal work executed before 1290." The piece is contemporary with the Syon Cope, and the accuracy of the date is established by the prominence accorded the arms of Edward I (1272-1307) and his Queen (who died in 1290), which appear on either side of the central panel.

The peculiar technique of these early works has been ably treated in a series of illustrated articles in the Burlington Magazine,<sup>2</sup> and the spiral stitchery employed by English craftsmen in depicting the features of the saints is distinctly shown in the reproduction of the Ascoli Cope above referred to. But while there are wonderful

<sup>1</sup>Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, London, March 14, 1907.

<sup>2</sup>May Morris. *Opus Anglicanum* in the Burlington Magazine, 1904-1905. Vol. 6, pp. 278, 440.

G. Baldwin Brown and Mrs. Archibald Christie. *St. Cuthbert's stole and maniple at Durham*. Vol. 23, London, 1913, Nos. CXXI, CXXII.

examples of the ecclesiastical work of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, little other than documentary evidence remains to us of the secular work of the period; the wardrobe accounts of English Royalty, however, furnish ample proof of an extravagant use of embroidery in the wearing apparel of the early Kings and Queens.

The field of needlework, an art naturally feminine, was, after the thirteenth century, also taken advantage of by men as a means of livelihood, for the accounts of Edward III<sup>3</sup> (1327-1377) record the payment of £140 to Thomas Cheiner for a "vest" embroidered with "divers work" for the King's Chaplain; while another entry refers to William Courtney, who embroidered a garment for the same King "with pelicans and tabernacles of gold."<sup>4</sup> In the accounts of Richard II (1377-1399) the names of William Sanston and Robert de Asshcombe are mentioned as *Broudatores Domini Regis* and that of Stephen Wyne, who later received a pension from Henry IV, as chief embroiderer to the King and Queen.

These facts lend weight to the theory advanced by Lethaby that the work of the great period was not altogether the product of religious orders, but trade work, wrought in London, probably under similar conditions to those prevailing a century later (1402) when embroidery is recorded as an organized craft, with wardens empowered to search out inferior work.

As the fifteenth century advanced, a marked change appeared in the character of ecclesiastical embroidery. In the design the charm of the early Gothic architecture was lost in heavy columns supporting embattled canopies; the exquisite detail of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries gave way to a broader technique in which the silk, no longer closely worked, was laid on in a flat surface stitch, only the gold thread work retaining any semblance of careful craftsmanship. The figures of the saints or apostles were often worked on

<sup>3</sup>Isabella, the Queen of Edward III, in 1317 presented to the Pope a richly embroidered cope. This date would correspond to the Pienza Cope.

<sup>4</sup>Chambers Journal, vol. 71, p. 629. London, 1894.

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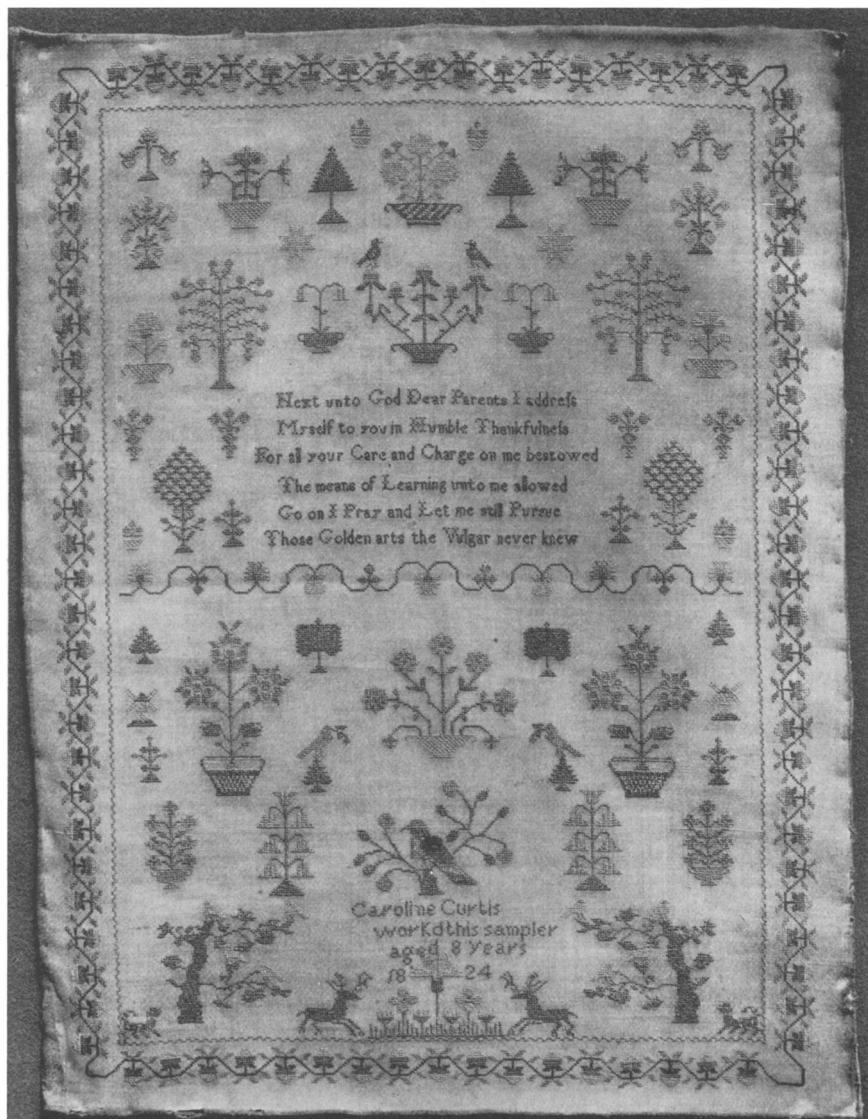
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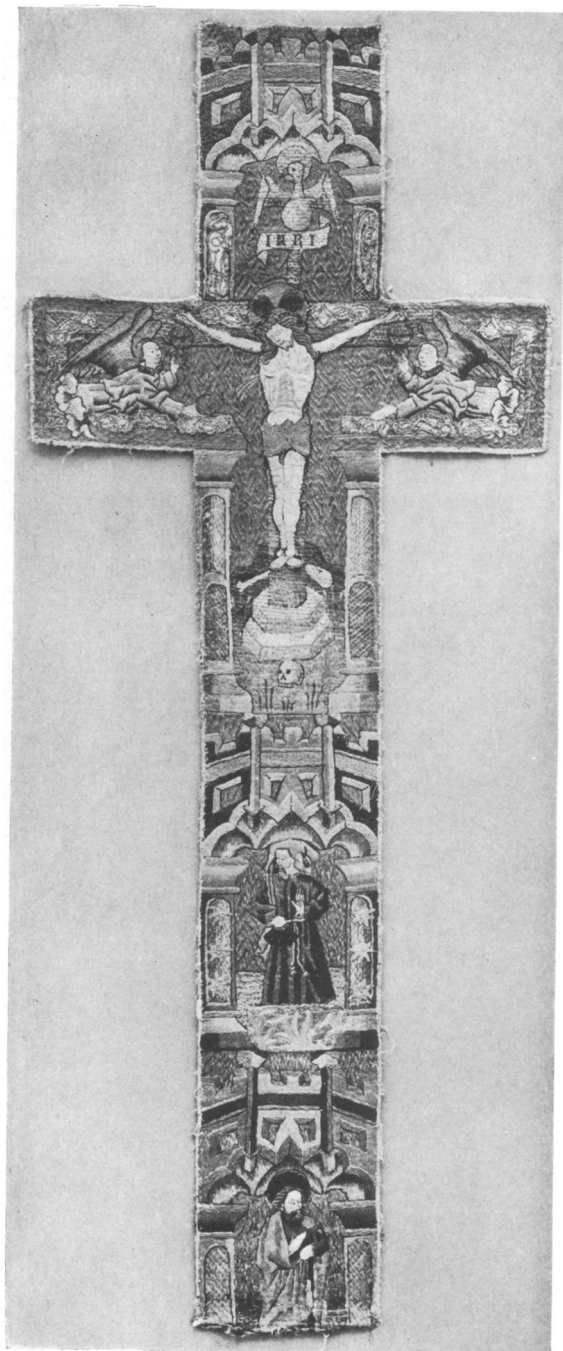
# BULLETIN OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

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ORPHREYS, ENGLISH, FIFTEENTH CENTURY

separate linen and applied — as is shown in the fifteenth century altar frontal of the collection — and the same figure repeated with slight variations, which may indicate that details were parceled out in lots to different workers. In fact, the work might almost be said to show a touch of modern commercialism, the duplication of patterns and laxity of technique re-

embroidered with treasonable churchly emblems, found in her wardrobe; and on this evidence she was "attainted of high treason and beheaded without the privilege of being heard in her own defence."<sup>1</sup>

The altar frontal above referred to has been identified as one described by T. J. Willson,<sup>2</sup> who in 1883 brought to the attention of the London Society of Antiquaries



STUART EMBROIDERY (STUMP WORK)

ABOUT 1640

sulting in an over-production that marked the decadence of the art.

The wholesale destruction of ecclesiastical vestments at the time of the Reformation and the mutilation of such as were spared left few original examples to posterity; for the possession of any vestment bearing a "popish" emblem was liable to cost the owner his head, or at least his goods. Historical proof of this is found in the case of the Countess of Salisbury, the mother of Cardinal Pole, who, at the age of seventy, was beheaded by her kinsman, Henry VIII. The only evidence against the victim was a white silk chasuble,

several pieces of ecclesiastical embroidery that originally formed part of the altar furnishings of the church of Kingery, Lincolnshire. In this remote village, sixteen miles northeast of Lincoln, Catholic services continued to be maintained in the ancient hall of the town after the estate was divided and sold some time in the latter part of the eighteenth century. This parish is one of those mentioned in the *Liber Regis* of Henry VIII, a volume compiled by order of that monarch, who

<sup>1</sup>Marshall. *English Embroideries*, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, 2nd Series, Vol. 9, p. 270. London, 1883.

appointed commissioners to make an inventory of all the ecclesiastical property in the Kingdom. In this report Kingerby is credited with a parish church dedicated to Saint Peter and a living valued at five pounds a year.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Willson dates these pieces from the latter part of the fifteenth century, and attributes their present "mutilated con-

pletely worked, both canopy, background and figure, on the piece of linen. In the third the figures are applied. These figures have gold thread in the cloak or outer dress."

The figures enumerated are:

"Moses with the Tables of the Law; Aaron (or Nathan) with a horn in right



THE STORY OF REBEKAH  
PETIT POINT, FIRST HALF OF SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

dition" to wear and tear and change of fashion. He also mentions the fact that the cope, a garment never used in penal times, has been made into a frontal, which he describes as follows:

"Frontal of red velvet (62 x 36 inches) divided into four panes by three orphreys. Two of the orphreys differ from the third; the two are com-

hand. St. Peter with a key. Two saints nimbed, carry what are probably palm branches. On the velvet panes, a cherub<sup>2</sup> feathered and winged, the hands joined in adoration. Ground occupied by cutwork flowers in bold design, yellow, blue, dark and pale green and gold set off by rays and scroll flouriations of yellow silk with spangles."

<sup>1</sup>"Kingerby, Vicarage (St. Peter): val. King's Books 51.... Patron, 1778, Catherine Parker, wid.,.... 66l. 18s. 2d. certified val." From *Liber Regis vel Thesaurus Rerum Ecclesiasticarum*, by John Bacon, Esquire. Receiver of the First-fruits. London, MDCCLXXVI.

<sup>2</sup>Four winged cherubim appear in the sculpture of Chartres Cathedral (thirteenth century) and in illuminations of the same period. Also in the stained glass of St. Albans Abbey. (cf. Hartshorne. *English Mediaeval Embroidery*, London, 1883, p. 101.)

The figure identified by Mr. Willson as Aaron or Nathan is more probably that of King David, the ermine robe and the ink-horn being emblematic of the royal psalmist. The two saints with palm branches doubtless represent Saint Simon with his emblem, a saw.

Other ecclesiastical pieces of this same period are the orphreys acquired by the Museum in 1911, one of which is of especial

Of more interest, perhaps, is the group which shows the hood and orphreys from a cope. The hood has a figure of the Virgin enthroned, bearing the Christ Child on her right arm and holding in her left hand a sceptre. The Virgin and Child wear robes worked in silver-gilt, the dress of the Virgin, worked in dull red, showing beneath her robe. The figure is placed beneath an architectural canopy capped with a finial



JAMES I AND ANNE OF DENMARK  
PETIT POINT, LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

interest in connection with the altar frontal just described. These orphreys are from a chasuble, the back orphrey being in the form of a cross, the front, a single strip. This single strip, which apparently has seen hard usage, is of the same design and workmanship, the figures being applied, as the left-hand strip of the altar frontal; which suggests the thought that possibly this too may originally have formed part of the altar furnishings of the little church at Kingerby.

ornament combining the red rose and a gilt fleur-de-lis. In the orphrey at the left, the central figure is Saint James the Less with book and club. Above him stands a prophet holding a money bag in his left hand, and below a prophet with a scroll. The orphrey at the right has Saint Paul with a prophet above and below.

In these embroideries the architectural setting of each figure is capped with a finial ornament in which the rose of York

or Lancaster is combined with the fleur-de-lis. In the hood the central motive above the head of the Virgin is the Lancaster rose (red) ensigned with the fleur-de-lis. The prominence assigned to the Red Rose, and the fact of the alternate use of the White and Red, each always ensigned with the golden fleur-de-lis, sug-

reigns still styled themselves "Kings of Great Britain, France and Ireland."

The donor of the original vestment may have been the mother of Henry VII, Lady Margaret (1441-1509), Countess of Richmond, who was famous for her ecclesiastical gifts, having endowed Christ's and St. John's Colleges, Cambridge, and



EMBROIDERED BEDSPREAD  
CREWEL WORK, LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

gests the period of Henry VII (1485-1509), who himself represented the claims of Lancaster, and his queen, Elizabeth, daughter of Edward IV, those of York, while their daughter Mary married Louis XII of France. The ensigning with the fleur-de-lis, however, may merely be the assertion of the old Plantagenet claim (made by York and Lancaster alike) to the Crown of France. It will be remembered that until the reign of George III the British sove-

reigns still styled themselves "Kings of Great Britain, France and Ireland."

The architectural details shown in these ecclesiastical pieces differ from those found in the embroideries of earlier date. The Gothic type with its delicate spiral columns supporting canopies of stem work and foliage, which supplanted the geometric period, gave way in the fifteenth century to the heavier type with niched piers and the overhanging embattled canopies; and



it is interesting to note in these transitional stages the parallel found in the designs used for painted glass of the same periods. Take, for instance, the rose window<sup>1</sup> at the Auxerres Cathedral (second quarter of the thirteenth century). In this the central motive, the Agnus Dei, is surrounded by eight trefoils framing four angels and the symbols of the four evangelists. This design, bisected, at once suggests the patterns of copes produced in the thirteenth century, notably the Syon Cope. Again in the De Moulins window of the Evreux Cathedral (fourteenth century) we find the identical twisted columns with foliated canopies which form the basis of the designs used for the copes of that period (i. e. the Pienza Cope); while the niched piers with embattled canopies shown in the embroideries under discussion are duplicated in the west window of Winchester Cathedral (first half of the fifteenth century). The parallel might also be carried a step further in tracing the rich yellow tones of the silks to the influence of the yellow enamel that first made its appearance in glass in the early fourteenth century.

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries we find the architectural motives abandoned for a ground powdered with individual devices, conventionalized floral forms, the lily, rose, or pomegranate interspersed with double-headed eagles or the feathered cherubim<sup>2</sup> and seraphim worked separately and applied. An example of this type of church embroidery is shown in the chasuble of green Italian brocade lent by Mr. Morgan. The foundation of this vestment was, without doubt, originally a cope. The ground is semé with floral forms worked in shades of brown and yellow with gold threads; the orphreys are of the same.

Turning to the group of secular embroideries, we find three distinct types, that done in tent stitch or petit point on

fine canvas, the raised or "stump" work of the Stuart period, and the crewel work often referred to as Jacobean work. Embroideries of the first and second groups are confined to what are often termed "tapestry" or "embroidered" pictures. These, when done in petit point, in many cases resemble tapestries in miniature. This is especially true of the exquisite piece lent by Mrs. J. W. Alexander in which there are 2,021 stitches to the square inch. The subject represents incidents in the life of Abraham, and in drawing, composition, and coloring it has all the charm of a Gobelin in miniature. The best period of this work dates from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but it continued to be popular throughout the century and was revived again in the early eighteenth century.

The earliest piece of this class owned by the Museum dates from the latter part of the sixteenth century, and represents James I and his Queen, Anne of Denmark; the panel is doubtless a fragment from a larger piece. The figures wear the elaborate costumes of the period. Other subjects represented in this type of work are Rebekah, of which there are two examples; Orpheus, unique in its silver thread background and occasional bits of raised work; Piping Shepherds and Shepherdesses with their flocks, a subject popular towards the end of the seventeenth century.

In Stuart embroidery a variety of subjects is represented: biblical, mythological, and royal. Two of these panels differ so markedly from the usual stump work as to class them outside of Stuart embroidery, although the technique is the same. These represent the legends of Saint Augustine and Saint Anthony, the figure of the saint in each instance occupying a central position in the composition. The work is on linen; the faces of wood are well modeled and covered with satin; the vestments and landscapes, worked almost entirely in metal, have turned a dingy brown. These are remarkable examples of unique composition that illustrate an interesting variety of this type of embroidery. Among the biblical subjects represented are Abraham and

<sup>1</sup>Westlake, N. H. J. *A History of Design in Painted Glass*. London, 1881.

<sup>2</sup>cf. fifteenth century glass at Lavenham showing tracery of cherubim; also the musical angels in glass of the same period at Beauchamp Chapel, Warwick.

Isaac, shown in several works, one a charming work-box lent by Mrs. Pinchot. Other subjects are the Queen of Sheba, Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve. Mythology is represented by the Judgment of Paris, Pomona, Vertumnus and Pomona, and, as above stated, Orpheus. The panels comprising royal subjects are chiefly devoted to portraits of Charles I and his Queen, Henrietta Maria, and Charles II and Catherine of Braganza. These royal personages, grouped sometimes with attendants or again as individual figures, are usually placed on a white satin background more or less covered with scattered floral forms, birds, and beasts, with the inevitable fountain or rocky pool and the castle in the background. The figures are richly appareled in costumes of the period, slight details in the dress often furnishing a clue as to the date of production. In the beautiful piece lent by Mrs. Alexander, the flaring boot tops of Charles II indicate that the piece was probably worked shortly after the coronation, at which time this style of lace-trimmed boot-top was introduced by English dandies who followed French fashions. This piece, in which the costumes of the king and queen are embellished with seed pearls, shows Stuart embroidery at its best period; later the raised work reached the extreme of grotesqueness shown in the fragmentary piece illustrating the Queen of Sheba before King Solomon, where the miniature dolls remind one of the wax effigies of royalty in Westminster Abbey. One unique piece, lent by Mr. William Milne Grinnell, is unusual in having a canvas background worked in basket stitch with three figures of animals in relief; this is an early example and shows a transition from the petit point canvas work, such as is found in the charming slippers lent by Mrs. Pinchot, to the raised work of the Stuart type.

Much has been written in regard to the origin of stump work; historical records would seem to indicate that needlework of this particular class was the popular diversion of the women of royalist households, and the rich materials employed in its production, and the sumptuous costumes portrayed, all point to such prov-

enance; furthermore, the elaborate book-bindings of Little Gidding might readily have proved an inspiration to the expert needlewomen of court circles who could produce, in delicate embroidery and stump work, portraits quite as charming as those of the artists who, a century later, used wax as a medium in miniature work.

Bead work, a fashion probably imported from Italy, gained in favor during the reign of Elizabeth and retained its popularity throughout the Stuart régime; it flourished side by side with stump work. A unique example may be seen in the piece recently presented to the Museum by Mr. Ephraim B. Levy. This dates from the middle of the century, the costumes of the figures corresponding to those shown in the Frans Hals portraits painted between 1645 and 1650.

The last group, the crewel work of the late seventeenth century, is represented by a bedspread and several smaller pieces. The spread, worked in various shades of deep blue, green, brown, and red on a white twilled ground, has a design more or less Oriental in character with its central tree rising from the bank of "terra firma" or "waves," an arrangement often found in Chinese embroideries, especially in mandarin coats. This style of work was much in vogue as bed and wall hangings toward the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, and doubtless was influenced by the importations of the East India Company. An apron in blue silk embroidered in crewel and gold thread is a later development of this work. This piece, with a delightful reticule of the same period, is the gift of Mrs. Frank D. Millet.

The charm of the collection is enhanced by its installation in the English room, supplemented as it is by household furnishings, notably the embroidered sofa and chairs of the period of Charles II, the gift of Mr. Alexander Smith Cochran. At the end of the gallery hangs De Heere's portrait of the Virgin Queen under whose régime the Embroiderers' Company was incorporated in 1561. The portrait, presented by Mr. Morgan in 1911, is three-quarters-length and shows the queen in a regal gown of rich embroidery.

F. M.